



## World Affairs Institute

---

WAR AND THE RACE

Author(s): WILL IRWIN

Source: *The Advocate of Peace (1894-1920)*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (FEBRUARY, 1917), pp. 50-52

Published by: [World Affairs Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20667711>

Accessed: 17/05/2014 03:12

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



World Affairs Institute and Heldref Publications are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Advocate of Peace (1894-1920)*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

go and then investigate the cause and seek the remedy. I am absolutely opposed to universal service or compulsory service or any kind of service except that which is rendered by willing men. I am opposed to it because dumb, driven cattle cannot be taught or trained. The Persians had universal service; the Greeks did not. It is not the size of your host, but the quality of it which adds luster to an army. Unwilling men burden armies, eat its substance, tax the people to death, retard its action, and give it panic. Even if there were enough jails and federal constabularies to enforce universal service without riots among a free people, it would not be good business to do it. The profession of arms ought to be honorable, spared from contamination by *mouldy and bull calf*."

The major's remarks about the conventionalities of military training interested the committee deeply.

"There is nothing subtle about *real* military training," he said, "though there may be plenty about *conventional* military training. It does not require years to train a soldier—for fighting. The individual instruction is simple. It can be done in weeks. With the proper machinery developed it can be done in less time than any army can cross the Atlantic. It was done in the volunteer regiments which went to the Philippines in '99. It is done in the Marine Corp all the time. It was done well at Plattsburgh in a month. To cook, to bivouac, to march, to move from column of march into line of fight, to dig, to shoot, to give first-aid treatment—these are the salient points of a real soldier's instruction. Yet these are not features practiced in conventional army life in the barracks.

"The art of living afield and the art of handling men afield are not learned in the barracks. Compare your mental picture of life and conditions at barracks with your mental picture of life in the trenches anywhere in Europe today or life in the armies in this country in the '60's. Do you see any similarity?"

"Conventional military training nowadays seems to run to getting into a camp with tents. Lee's army had no tents, neither did Napoleon's, and I venture to say that you will find but few tents in Europe today—armies which cannot live afield without tents are not armies; they are camping parties. Caesar tells us that the Gauls did not sleep under a roof for seven years. Any army which intends to move cannot encumber itself with tents—and living in tents is not real training."

Then he outlined rapidly his suggestions for "real preparedness," the mobilization on a volunteer basis each year for six months' training of the youths of the country. No one should take the training who did not desire to and no one should be held who wanted to quit. Those who quit before the course of intensive training was over simply forfeited their pay; that was all. After one month's individual training, the major would send the different parts of the army afield in bivouac and on the march, assembling with other bodies forming larger bodies, and gradually moving toward the government reservations, where actual armies instead of imaginary armies would operate against each other—a sort of sublimated Plattsburgh.

"An army thus afield," said the major, "would accumulate field habits instead of barrack habits. It would furnish the staff an opportunity to cater to actual armies

and discover their habits and needs. The discipline which such an experience would give men, the discipline of intelligent and willing cooperation, is the only discipline that is worth anything.

"The true discipline is not the kind that reduces a man to the level of a horse, teaches him to obey and do what he is told, that breeds within him a fear of his superior officers and of the law. Such a discipline will not serve you in time of danger.

"Real discipline, even from the military point of view, is the discipline which comes from comradeship and community of interest. Active armies are always disciplined; idle bodies are never so."

The speaker's comments on the existing military machine interested the committee.

"If war should come now the most serious problem would not be the lack of numbers, the lack of men able to bear arms with credit to themselves. The most serious problem would come from the necessity of working off the dead wood which rises to the top of the military service by the passage of time, the elimination of the men who are entrenched by law, but who are unaccustomed to the habits of active armies. The development of new leaders and the casting off of the old were the real problems of the war of the 60's. Why not develop leaders now by each year organizing simply and without legalistic red tape armies for active field service?"

"The profession of armies is my profession. What I have said has not been said in hostility, but in a desire to point out the only course which, in my judgment, will bring the profession into closer friendship with the people of our country."

## WAR AND THE RACE

By WILL IRWIN

IT TAKES a long time usually for a new idea to get itself fixed in the minds of the nations. In the normal course of events the sound and original thinker is fortunate, very fortunate, if he can look forward to implanting his idea in two or three generations. But in the short period between July, 1914, and June, 1916, a new idea, hardly considered before the war, has taken hold of the more civilized nations of western Europe. A tiny germ of thought has grown into a full-fledged tree. What only a few advanced scholars knew before, the people of the workshops, the cottages, and the farms know now.

It is this: War doesn't pay, can never pay again, because of its effect on human breeding. It will weaken toward the vanishing point any breed of men that ever undertakes it again. Expressed in the language of the schools, it is a backward step in evolution. I have talked war with British officers and British Tommies, with English ladies of fashion and with English housewives, with French deputies and French cabmen, with French dressmakers and French mondaines, and in all minds alike I find the same idea fixed. What is to become of the French race and the British race—yes, and the German race—if this thing keeps up?

All of which was a new, obscure, and perhaps rather discredited theory before the war. It was seldom put forward as an argument to prove the folly of warfare.

Even Norman Angell, in his peace classic, "The Great Illusion," devotes only a page or so to this aspect of the subject, and he writes at this point rather hazily and in such fashion as to show that he has not put his best thought to it. The only man I know of who has stated the issue squarely is Chancellor Emeritus David Starr Jordan, of Stanford University, and Dr. Jordan has tried in vain, it seems to me, for a large hearing.

In the year before the war Dr. Jordan lectured on his theories among the German universities. A Stanford graduate who heard him once told me last winter about his reception. The lectures did not "draw." The students in the audience came through curiosity. There was a discussion afterwards. These youths, brought up on the "religion of valor," could not subscribe to theories so bizarre. Afterward, Jordan was remembered in that university as a harmless though interesting crank from America, the land of shallow doctrine.

Those apologists for war, like Bernhardt, the Philosopher of Hell, say that it is a "biological necessity"; that it is the "survival of the fittest"; that through it the human race improves. The exact reverse is true. Bernhardt and his fellows are professional soldiers, arguing for the glory and the prosperity of their class. They are special pleaders, like the liquor dealers, who maintain that free consumption of alcohol is good for the race, or the cotton-mill owners, who hold that child labor is good for the body politic. And they begin with the fallacy of assuming that a race has the same rules of life as an individual—a trick of argument which has slain its thousands of truths. Wild male animals of belligerent tendencies, they say, get out to fight, and fight. The weakest are killed; the strongest survive to propagate the race; and so the race improves.

That might have been true; possibly it was true of primitive times. Two tribes went out to war. All the men joined in, weak and strong alike. It was hand-to-hand combat, with clubs or spears. In such fighting, of course, the weak and stupid went down, and the strong and clever survived. But from the moment when man invented bows and arrows and other weapons which killed at a distance, all that began to change. With the invention of gunpowder it changed still more; with the great improvement of artillery it changed most of all. Today a squad of French soldiers stands at a crossroads. In that squad is one fine young fellow, well-brained, well-muscled, capable of great things if his life be spared; capable also of being father to a strong generation. Beside him stands an undersized dolt, who has barely passed the medical examiners. A German gunner, five miles away, gets the range from an aeroplane, and drops a shell among these Frenchmen, killing half of them. "A cannon," as the Chinese Minister at Brussels gravely informed his colleagues just before the German invasion, "has no eyes." The young genius is just as likely to be killed as the dolt—no more, no less. There is no "natural selection" at the front nowadays. Or, if there is, it works the wrong way; the bravest are the best, physically and spiritually. Now, in this war of machinery, this meat mill, it is the bravest who lead the charges and attempt the daring feats, and correspondingly the loss is greatest among those bravest.

In the conscript countries, like France and Germany,

there is a process of selection in picking the army by which the best—speaking in general terms—go out to die, while the weakest remain; the undersized, the undermuscled, the underbrained, the men twisted by hereditary deformity or devitalized by hereditary disease—they remain at home to propagate the breed. The rest, all the rest, go out to take chances.

There is still another hideous fact in this accumulation of hideous facts. As modern conscript armies are organized, it is the youngest men who sustain the heaviest loss—the men who are not yet fathers. And from the point of view of the race that is, perhaps, the most melancholy fact of all. All the able-bodied men of France between the ages of nineteen and forty-five are in the ranks. But in neither the French or the German do the older men take many chances with death. The fighting age, as E., a British officer, once said to me, is the athletic age. At about that early period of life when the sprinter finds that he can no longer do ten seconds; when the baseball player goes back to the minors; when the champion pugilist discovers that youth will be served, a man begins to deteriorate as a soldier. He has no longer that last ounce of physical force for a supreme effort; his physical flaws begin to tell under hardship; finally he loses the reckless courage of youth. This is well understood by all military authorities.

These European conscript armies are arranged in classes according to age, and the younger classes are the men who do most of the actual fighting. The men in their late thirties or their forties, the "Territorials," guard the lines, garrison the towns, generally attend to the business of running up the supplies. When we come to gathering the statistics of this war, we shall find that an overwhelming majority of the dead were less than thirty years old, and probably that the majority were under twenty-five. Now, the territorial of forty or forty-five has usually given to the State as many children as he is going to give, while the man of twenty-five or under has usually given the State no children at all. It is a brutal fact that it would be better for the future of any race if the process were reversed—if the men over forty years old had to endure the process of mortality and the men under twenty were spared.

The French are not publishing their losses, and estimates vary. I am pretty sure, though, that since the war began France has lost a million men, killed or so badly mutilated that they may be counted out of the history of the race. The slightly wounded, or even such of the heavily wounded as can be made whole again, are another matter. This war, unfortunately, is going on. The best informed see no end to it for a long, long time—certainly not until far into 1917.

Now, this million, as I have tried to show, constitutes the real aristocracy of France on the male side. They were just coming into the flower of their usefulness, both to their generation and to the coming race. A famous horse trainer said once: "Give us the human race to breed as we breed horses, and we would give you supermen in a century." Were one proceeding to carry out that cold-blooded process with the French he would select from the whole French race the very million now under the soil or hopelessly crippled.



The process must be almost exactly the same in Germany. She has a larger population, and therefore more men. But she has been fighting on two frontiers, and has been bolstering up several weaker allies. Her losses must have been as heavy as France's in proportion to her population—probably heavier. Your Bernhardt, driven into the corner with such facts as these, would probably answer that he was thinking in terms of races; that in war the stronger races survive, the weaker perish, and the whole human breed profits thereby. By the stronger race, Bernhardt, being a German, means the German race.

That rule worked once, perhaps. When the European races were first building, they met and conquered several inferior peoples. I imagine that Attila's Huns were a race decidedly inferior to the Franks, who annihilated them. But there is no such difference between the six great civilized, modern nations who are fighting out this war in western Europe. Grant, for the sake of argument, that Germany is the superior nation, the coming race; yet any reasonable pro-German must admit that the margin of superiority is very small indeed. Grant also that Germany wins overwhelmingly, and gains the "place under the sun." No one is going to win overwhelmingly in this war, but grant it. She would probably, could she measure it, find her stock reduced below the standard of the "lowest," the most "inferior," race of her enemies as that race stood before the war. The "lower," the "inferior," races would go still further back, and we should find the blood of all Europe thinned, the physical and mental standards of all Europe lowered. As a matter of fact, that has already happened to a certain extent. It was only a year or so before the war that Bernhardt put forth his "biological necessity," his "survival of the fittest" nonsense. No man was ever so quickly or so thoroughly proved a fool.

I have omitted England from this calculation. Yet it works out toward the same end. Never before in the world was there such a volunteer army as Britain has raised. The number of men from the British Isles under arms is perhaps 5,000,000. And here, even more than in the conscript countries, the process is selective. Those who have volunteered are characteristically the best young men of Britain for physical and moral force.

"We cannot stop now," said a German journal some time ago; "England has not yet suffered enough." It is true that the British losses so far have been far lower than those of France and Germany. But from this time forth England will lose more and more, until her blood also is drained.

However, the British have sustained their losses in such fashion as to drive home the point to support in the British mind this new theory, which all western Europe is beginning to understand. Your typical Britain worships "class." Be he upper class, lower class, or middle class, he believes in his bones that the aristocracy is really and literally the best of England. Now, so far the losses have fallen most heavily on the aristocracy. The upper class and the middle class were the first to respond to the call of England. In the early days of the war they took service anywhere—in the corps of officers, in the army service corps, and in the ranks. And of the 70,000 who retreated from Mons, and of the

120,000 who held the line at Ypres, comparatively few survive to this day. Later on, England began making subalterns, or second lieutenants, of her "gentlemen" class. The traditions of the British army are such that the subaltern must take the greatest chances of all. The life of a subaltern on the line is as short as that of an artillery horse. Great family after great family has lost all its male heirs. By the end of the first year major titles were already extinct. An English marquis and a plain Warwickshire Tommy have spoken to me of the situation in almost identical terms. "What are we going to do for gentlemen if this thing keeps up?" they said. By what is happening to the aristocracy the Britisher measures what is happiness to the whole race.

## NERONIAN NAÏVETÉ

By ELMER WILLIS SERL

IN A letter written by a German soldier to a teacher in German Switzerland there was this significant sentence: "I have friends who suffer at the idea of being able to do nothing for the fatherland. Let them stay at home with a calm conscience! All depends on their peaceful work. But let the war enthusiasts come! Perhaps they will learn to keep silent."

Recently, upon reading an essay by Miss Agnes Repplier, entitled "Living in History," I thought that the above sentence from the German soldier's letter might well be pondered by that militant essayist. Miss Repplier accuses those pacifists who refuse to see glory on battlefields and heroism in butchery of being indifferent to the teaching of history.

When Nero practised his little pleasures he doubtless thought that he was the exponent of "living," if not in history, at least for history. It is this attitude of naïve ignorance which many essayists of the present hour exhibit when they attempt to dignify their preachments by an appeal to a bellicose yesterday.

The pacifist is afforded many exhibitions for amusement. Finding himself unobliged to explain his own attitude, since consistent pacifism is founded on practical human relationships, unbiased by tradition, he marvels at the mental contortions of the militarists. Some of the advocates of force, apparently, are beginning to feel that there is some doubt about the heroism of the gun philosophy of life, and they are referring to it as merely a temporary expediency. Others advocate force as a stage in the world advance, but are disturbed by their inability to harmonize the advance with failure to arrive. Still others are exasperated with the neutrality of the pacifist and call him "mentally fatigued" and advise him to "live in history." To this latter class belongs the writer of the article referred to above.

This recent effusion of Miss Repplier is an amusing effort of the military mind to dignify itself. It is amusing in its Neronian naïveté. Sublimely unconscious of her partial and distorted reading of history and posing as the interpreter of world civilization *à la sword*, Miss Repplier illustrates the mental hysteria which gathers its premises from world barbarism of the past and seeks to substantiate an argument for civilization today and tomorrow.